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Investing in student nutrition

Testimony as prepared for delivery by Assistant State Superintendent Duy Nguyen

EAU CLAIRE – The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction today released the following testimony, as prepared for delivery, to be provided at an upcoming Joint Committee on Finance listening session on the 2023-25 biennial budget. Gov. Tony Evers' budget proposal, released in February, *provides historic support of the state's public schools and libraries during a time of critical need.*

My name is Duy Nguyen, and I am the assistant state superintendent for the Division for Academic Excellence at the Department of Public Instruction. I am here to advocate for the Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids initiative to provide universal free school meals in Wisconsin.

We know, as educators, that we must meet the basic needs of our students in order for them to access learning. Food is one such basic need. As adults responsible for the wellbeing of Wisconsin's children, we must ensure they are fed. This shows care, humanity, and a connected community.

Children should have access to free school meals.

Today, I am speaking as an education leader here in Wisconsin with a lived experience that I want to share. Years ago, when I was in elementary school having recently arrived in Wisconsin as a refugee from Vietnam, I qualified for free school lunch. And while the bright orange free lunch ticket achieved the goal of keeping me fed, it did not show me care; it was one more way I was different, one more indication that my family struggled, and one more way I could be seen as less worthy than my peers. I was 5 years old when I had this thought. No 5 year old should doubt their own self-worth.

That 5 year old is why we need universal free school meals in Wisconsin. The Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids initiative respects the dignity of our children, sets them up for success in the classroom, and shows that Wisconsin can meet children's basic needs. It shows them we care.

Thank you for your time.

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